

FAQ – Separation

Q: What is Advocates for Malibu Public Schools (AMPS)?

A: AMPS is a local community group dedicated to excellence in education for the Malibu community. The group was started in the fall of 2010 in the aftermath of the failed Point Dume charter effort. The group's goal was to refocus the entire community on maintaining and expanding excellence in all of the Malibu public schools.

Q: And now AMPS is leading the effort to separate Malibu from the Santa Monica – Malibu School District?

A: Yes. Fairly quickly after looking at how best to support public schools in Malibu we discovered that our ability to help was tightly constrained by the political structure of the district. Malibu is part of the Santa Monica – Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD). SMMUSD contains two separate and discontinuous cities, Santa Monica and Malibu. Separated by the Pacific Palisades, 83% of SMMUSD's students and 100% of her school board members are from Santa Monica. With just 17% of the voters in the district, Malibu has had just two of the 24 school board members elected since 2000 – and none elected since 2004. It was clear to us that for Malibu's voice to be heard in the direction of our schools, changes would have to be made.

Q: What kind of changes do you mean?

A: Well, we currently have no votes on the district's governing body, the school board. Not only that, the same math applied everywhere across the district's structure. We have only a tiny fraction of the seats on the district's influential Financial Oversight Committee. We had no members on the board of Committee for Excellent Public Schools (CEPS), the outside advocacy group ostensibly representing the two communities joined in the district. In PTA Council, the group that joins all the individual PTA units from all the schools, there is only one Malibu resident on the executive board. Across the district, we had somewhere between two out of ten seats and no seats at all. It was clear that had to change.

Separation was not our first choice. We appealed to the school board. We asked for a non-voting member of the school board representing Malibu – the same as each of the three high schools have now. That request was denied. The district's supervising body, the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) suggested that we petition them to change the school board elections to "by trustee voting," meaning having each neighborhood elect its own representative. As we prepared to submit that petition, LACOE discovered that the school district's governing documents are not under LACOE jurisdiction, rather they are under the city charter of Santa

Monica. Finally, we ran three highly qualified Malibu candidates in the 2012 SMMUSD school board election. They ran against three candidates from Santa Monica for three school board seats. In spite of receiving nearly 80% of the vote in Malibu, no Malibu candidate won a seat. All three Santa Monica candidates won re-election, two for their fourth term. We have exhausted all the means for getting Malibu a voice in the running of our schools save separation. Further, we have come to believe that separation is not only the solution to having our voices heard in the governance of our schools, it is a good onto itself.

Q: What do you mean, "A good onto itself?"

A: As we began to investigate separation, we discovered that separation would benefit both districts. From a leadership point of view, today the school board has to oversee affairs in two unconnected and very different cities, separated by distance and desires. Even if SMMUSD's school board gave Malibu proportionate consideration, that would only account for 17% of their attention. With local control, Malibu's schools could have a school board to focus on its issues with 100% of its attention.

Q: What about the money? How can Malibu afford to be its own district?

A: Were Malibu to become an independent school district, it would be funded from its own property taxes. These taxes would provide considerably more income than we currently receive as our share of SMMUSD's spending. Net of everything, Malibu's schools would have approximately \$2.6mm more to spend than it currently spends.

Q: What about costs? Won't we need many things Santa Monica currently provides?

A: Yes, we would most likely need to spend more than our share of the current centralized costs, but not much more. We have studied the practices of similar sized innovative school districts around the state and feel comfortable that there are many ways to run a district of our size well within our means. There is also research that confirms our investigations, suggesting that Malibu's schools would be optimally sized for cost efficiency!

Q: What about Santa Monica?

A: That's the best part, Santa Monica would gain from the separation too! Not only would they remove the distraction to their school board of administrating two different cities' schools, they'd gain financially too. By getting rid of Malibu, Santa Monica would get back approximately \$2mm it gives to the school district that is currently spent in Malibu! Both cities gain focused local control of their schools and better financial situations than is currently the case.